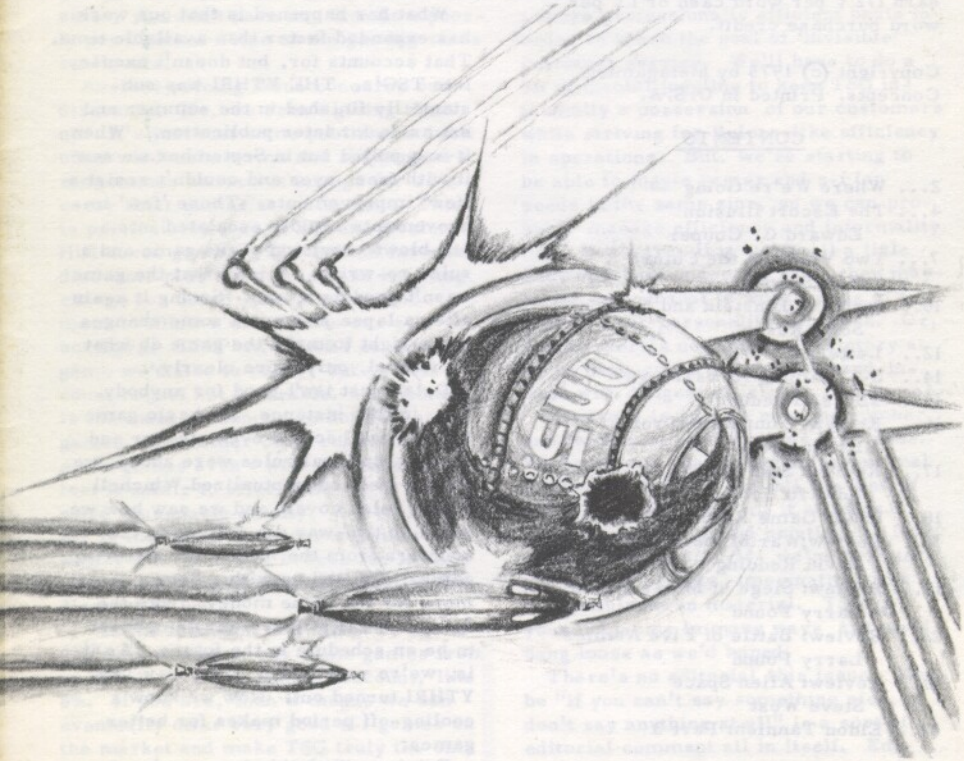
the SPACE GAMER

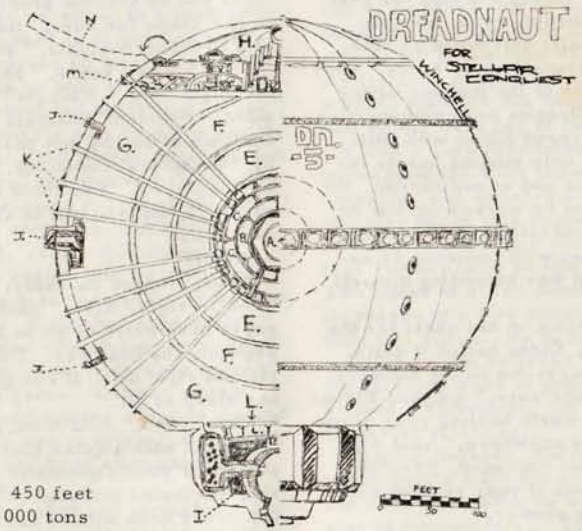
Issue Number 3. $1



STELLAR CONQUEST battle scene:
Lone Dreadnaught battles an Attack group.

Winchell Chung jr.

Note to consistancy freaks on Dreadnaught. Yes, I know that a matter/antimatter 8MA drive is impractical (you need to convert 33,000 tons of mass into energy to accelerate only 1000 tons of mass, the photon blast would be ten times the power the sun gives to the earth so if one millionth of that reaches the vessel as waste heat it would immediately evaporate, etc., etc.) But the other "respectable" drive lying around was the Bussard Ramjet (if you haven't heard of it read Tau Zero by Poul Anderson) and that has to be cylindrical. Note the sphere has practically no blind spots. You could have a Bussard "ferry" to cart DN's to the star but that would needlessly complicate the game. Oh, well! .....Winchell Chung



Diameter: 450 feet
Mass: 50,000 tons

A) artificial gravity and gyros
B) ship control
C) crew quarters and misc.
D) gunnery control
E) ammunition
F) supplies and life support
G) ice and fuel (auxiliary shield)
H) planetary attack weapons
I) matter/antimatter photon drive
J) electromagnetic weaponry
K) missile silos
L) engineering deck
M) planetary attack control
N) planetary attack cowling, mirrored for focusing of photon blast

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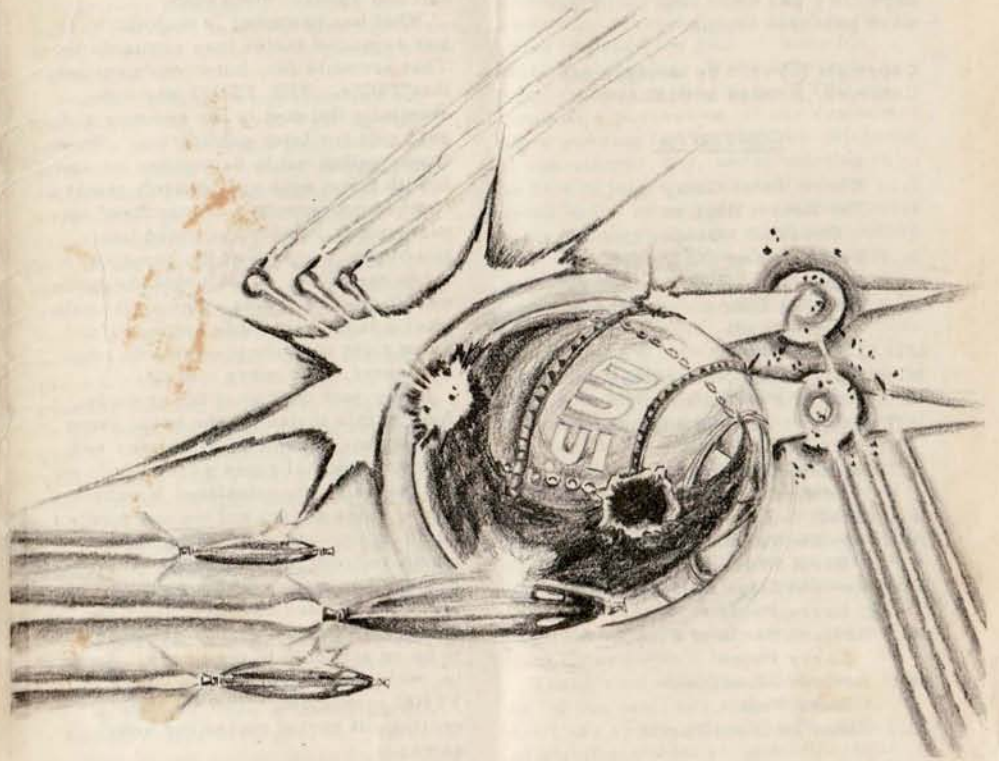

STELLAR CONQUEST battle scene:
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The Space Gamer is published by Metagaming Concepts quarterly and is devoted to SF&F gaming. A six issue subscription is $5, renewal $4, in the U.S. and Canada only. Contributions earn 1/2 ¢ per word cash or 1 ¢ per word purchase credit.

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Editor: Howard Thompson
Some interior illustrations by
Paul Jaquays

Our cover shows nine Attack (ATK) class ships battling an enemy Dreadnaught (DN). The DN has so many beam projectors it emits a plane of energy, rather than a needle. Most of the ATK's beams are being dispersed by the DN's protective forcefield. The stardrive portion of the ATK's is detachable for greater maneuverability. The Attacks shown have probably parked their stardrives around a convenient planet for later recovery.

WHERE WE'RE GOING

Customer Service: There's no way around the fact that we were three weeks late with TSG #2, four weeks late with THE YTHRI, and about a week late with this issue. Business operations should ideally be invisible to our readers. Quality output should appear on schedule, plop, plop, plop in your mailbox without you having a second thought as to how it got there, except that you wanted it. We failed that this fall and excuses don't help.

What has happened is that our work has expanded faster than available time. That accounts for, but doesn't excuse, late TSG's. THE YTHRI was substantially finished in the summer and set aside for later publication. When it was pulled out in September we saw it with fresh eyes and couldn't resist a 'few' improvements. Those 'few' improvements rapidly escalated into a full-blown revision of the game and a rules re-write. It isn't that the game wasn't good as it was. Seeing it again after a lapse just made some changes seem right to make the game do what we wanted, only more clearly.

Delay just isn't good for anybody. But, in this instance, the basic game system has become even cleaner and simple; optional rules were added; we got the well-conceptualized Winchell Chung rules cover; and we saw how we could do two-way die cutting on the counters from the War of the Wizards game. You end up with a better game, more for the same money, from the delay. We'll still try our damnedest to be on schedule in the future. As it is, we're very proud of the way THE YTHRI turned out. Now we know a cooling-off period makes for better games.

Pricing: With this issue we've decided to go to $5 for six issues of TSG, with a renewal for six issues at the $4 rate we'd already announced for January one. Current subscribers as of December 1, 1975, will be allowed to extend their subscriptions for an additional six issues at the $3 rate until December 31, 1975, as long as you don't go for more than issue number 20. The last issue number of your subscription appears in the upper right hand corner of the mailing label.

We wanted a fairly inexpensive communications vehicle in TSG and everyone wants a low price. However, the consensus seems to be that subscribers want us to do more, even if the cost is a bit higher. $5, with a $4 renewal price, is still pretty cheap (try it in 1967 dollars), but it will allow us to do a few more things. Most improvements will come with a larger circulation forcing our unit cost down and our increasing experience with publishing a zine. We'd like to grow up to the visual impact of some of the better-done s-f zines with a variety of material. For you gamers who aren't familiar with s-f zines, you don't have any idea how poorly put together some of the gaming zines really are.

Another pricing issue concerns our discounts. No, we aren't giving them up! It's just that some publishers don't offer wholesale terms and shipping arrangements attractive enough for us to carry their games at a discount. This is particularly true of SPI and Avalon Hill boxed games. The lack of favorable discounts plus the mailing and handling charge for boxed games is just too much to allow a discount to our subscribers. TRIPLANETARY is another game we'd like to carry, but our discount is just not favorable. Economics is the main reason we do not sell some games. The other chief reason is that some games aren't well done and we feel it unfair to offer them as if they were reasonable quality. Another factor is that after we carry a game for a while, the volume of orders for it slips and it begins to be harder to justify the discount to you.

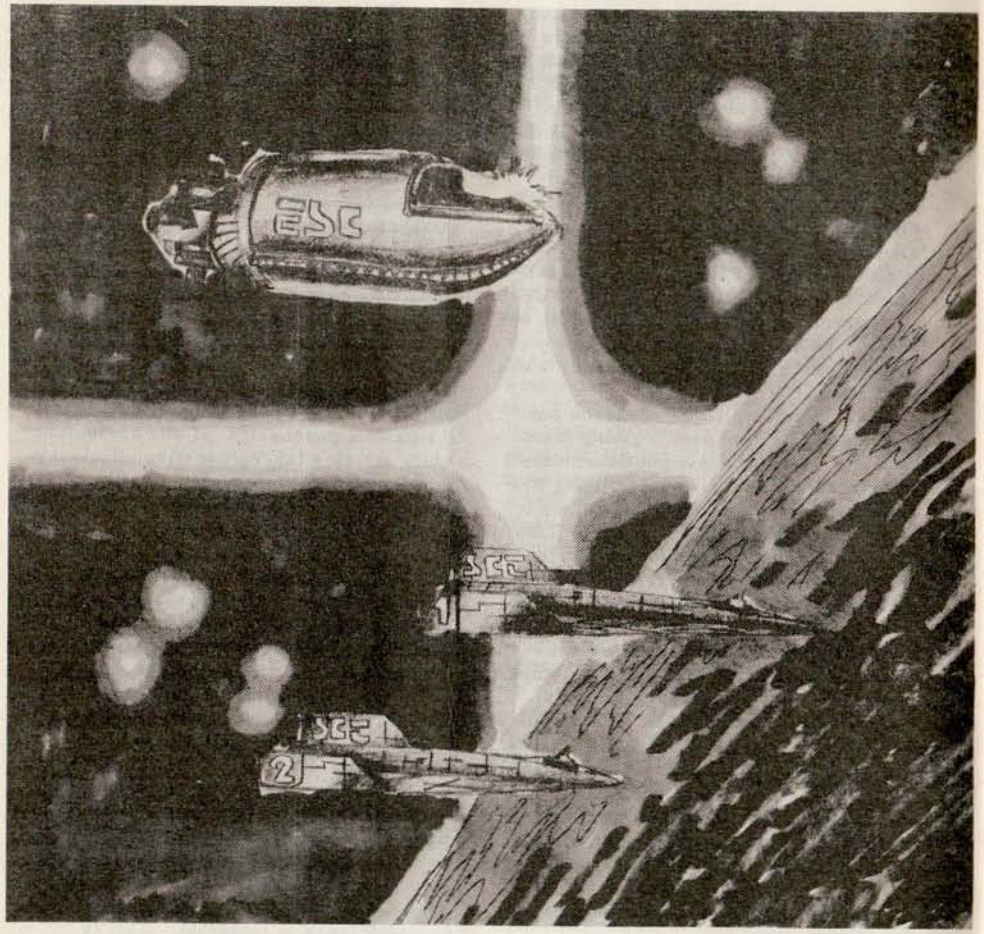
In the feedback this time we ask if you'd be willing to buy some games from us at full or only nominal discount, like 5%. If you are, then it means we can eventually offer very good s-f games on the market and make TSG truly the only thing an s-f gamer really needs. When you buy from us by mail, you would get at least the same price as other mail dealers and you'd be directly helping a strictly s-f&f operation. We will still offer out 15% or so discount for every game we can buy economically. What will probably happen is that after we've carried a title for a while, the 15% discount may slip to 10% to reflect the cost of handling smaller volumes of more, different games.

1976: Only a few things are really definite for 1976 right now. We can continue TSG at least as good as it is now even if we don't get a single other subscriber. At least four TSG's will come out in 1976. We will also publish at least one staff game design and one outside design. That represents the bare minimum we can do in our conservative cash and carry approach to future planning.

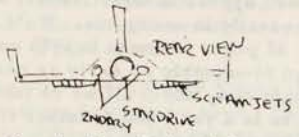
Much more likely, even in a very conservative scenario, is that we will roughly double the size of our customer base and business during 1976. That means we have to put our business operations of producing and processing on a more professionally efficient basis in order to reach the goal of 'invisible' customer service. We'll have to do a bit of mental juggling to keep TSG informally a possession of our customers while striving for Vulcan-like efficiency in operations. But, we're starting to be able to juggle gamer and s-f fan needs in the same zine, so we can probably manage efficiency and informality too. If it's true that we're all a little schizophrenic under the skin, then maybe we can put that to work for us in a kind of split-personality approach. Or, maybe there's nothing contradictory at all in easy-going informality hand-in-hand with diligent efficiency. Hope so!

Everyone is sure to note the number and variety of contributions this issue. We hoped our reader participation goal would be achieved, but it's the kind of thing you don't know 'til it happens. Even though we goofed printing the 1¢/2¢ rate instead of 1/2¢/1¢, we're sure to get a lot of variety, imagination, and thoughtfulness in material. TSG is your magazine in many ways and we'll hang loose as we'd hoped.

There's no editorial this issue. Maybe "if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all" is a sort of editorial comment all in itself. Editorials will appear in later issues, but not necessarily in every one. We'd like to make 32 pages or more in 1976 and maybe go bi-monthly as early as next fall. Right now, about all we're looking forward to is a year-end breather to let 1976 have a chance to gell in our minds and to catch up on some of the really great mail y'all send. See you in the new year....good gaming!



(Two Scouts, with an Escort for protection, investigate a new planet. Illustration by, Winchell Chung Jr.)



The Scouts Star Drive is located at the end of the fuselage. The two secondarys are on either side and the Atmospheric ScramJets are slung under each wing. The Escorts secondary drive is only on one end, unlike the Attacks.

Ed Cooper raises the interesting question of how much an Escort in Stellar Conquest is really worth. The lowly ESC seems to reveal hidden qualities for the alert player in all phases of the game, no matter how you decide to figure the probabilities.

THE ESCORT ILLUSION

(Reprinted from Kelly Moorman's Interstellar News copyright 1975, with his permission.)

One common, recurrent flaw on the part of most Stellar Conquest players is to under estimate the value of the Escort (ESC). Why is still a mystery to me, though I have come to attribute it to two basic oversights. I think players become too anxious for rapid military buildup and perhaps neglect fine detail in trying to be farsighted in looking ahead to future production years. In the case of the latter, it is good to try and be farsighted in a society level game such as SC, yet SC is also a game of much detail. Failure to recognize this has cost many a player his position in the game, myself included.

It's interesting to note, in reviewing past games with other players, there appeared to be a distinct lag in production around production years four and five directly associated with over expenditures for advanced shipping in the early stages of the game. Players spending their IU's for Attacks (ATK) during the first and second production years did not have the chance to increase industrial capacity to maximum efficiency later on. Developing industry too late can be a waste of IU's that could be spent for better things. Remember, it takes four production years or 16 game turns for new industry to pay for itself in terms of IU output. With wars possible as early as production year four or five many players find themselves overwhelmed by players who invested in industry early. In the early stages of the game where contact is restricted, because of the Ship Range Limit (rule 9.1.1.1), a player who obtains Improved Industrial Technology (IIT) almost immediately and builds mostly industry is capable producing significant war material just when war is most likely. Even though a players initial IU's went toward ship production he can't match the warship output of the player who opted for early industrialization.

By the end of the fourth production year a player can have a total of 72 million colonists and 20-30 extra IU's from early inve stments making a total yield in the area of 100 IU's. The early industrializer is not only capable of turning out numerous types of shipping, he is economically prepared to have other colonists venture forth in the forthcoming turns without crippling his production. Why with a little bit of risk, a player can up the figure of 100 IU's even more. He also has the ability to send constant probes (weak fleets--mostly made up of escorts!) deep into enemy territory to keep other players off balance, causing them to divert IU's from industrial buildup into defense. Thus, the off balance player's industrial potential is never fully realized.

To avoid this problem, the ESC must become the workhorse of a player's fleet until such a time as ATK research (35 IU's) can be pursued without seriously damaging a colony's chance for survival. Even when your first ATK's are built, it may be wise to hold them in reserve, either building up for a first strike or trying to convince your opponents you haven't achieved that level of development yet.

Still, there are those who ask, "but why the Escort?" To them I ask, "Why not the Escort?"

The Escort is the most versatile of the three types of ships possible in Stellar Conquest. A lot of players disagree, charging that the ESC is too apt to destruction by ATK's. These players have once again failed to see the tactical advantages involved, especially in PBM games where only another player's 'presence' is given and not how many ships occupy a star hex. They also have not examined the laws of probability as well as they should.

You have the ideal scout in the ESC traveling solo. ESC's can explore star systems with the option of holding them from other players' development, an option denied the unarmed Scout (SCT), and can scout opponents defenses able to strike immediately at weak spots. An SCT can only relay information of promising conquests back to base and wait for warships. The delay often allows the defender time to reinforce his discovered outpost before the attack force can arrive. The ESC posing as scout also eliminates the possibility of Exploration Risk (rule 4.2.1) and therefore saves you from wasting IU's on destroyed scouts. The SCT probing another player's defenses has something like a 2/3's chance of being destroyed as opposed to a 10% to 33% chance for the ESC.

The ESC can play the role of convoy duty to Colony Transports (CT) as well,

here again eliminating undue risk. Sure, the ATK or Dreadnaught (DN) can do this, but, let's face it, hardly any players delegate them to such a task. Yet it is a task which has to be done.

Another ESC advantage is it's by far the cheapest vehicle space, on a performance to price ratio. The ESC cost is 8IU, the ATK is 20IU. Taking research cost into account your first ATK costs 55IU, a considerable sum. The standard arguement against this goes something like, "an ATK has twice the destructive potential of an ESC, two possible die rolls for hits compared to one, which justifies the extra expenditure." But, does an ATK really have twice the potential? Definitely not! Even if they were right the ATK has a lot more than twice the destructive potential because you have two die rolls out of six, compared to three out of 36 for the ESC, to score a destructive hit.

Outwardly it is true your Player Data Sheet says as much, but fortunately Stellar Conquest was designed to let you read between the lines. A two out of six chance for the ATK is a 1/3 probability compared to a 1/12 probability for a single ESC. Notice I said single ESC. At a 20 IU cost you can build 2.5 ESC's (rounded to three) to one ATK. Therefore your true probability would be 3 x 1/12 or 1/4.

Further, the same number rolled with two dice is never rolled twice and your most frequently rolled numbers are 6, 7, 8 (greatest probability). A fleet of three ESC's, which cost the same as one ATK without research cost included, will have three chances of destroying the ATK while the ATK has only one chance of destroying one of the ESC's.

It is a fact that for every roll up until your third or fourth roll your probability of rolling your desired number increases up to 2%, less afterwards. Thus, it follows that the greater number of ships one has the greater your chances of scoring a hit, no matter how powerful the ships in question may be. For example: the first roll of your ESC's is a six, a miss. Now subtract the possibility of getting a six, five rolls, from 36, total number of combinations with two dice. This leaves a remainder of 31. Now divide 31 by 3, the possibility of getting a ten (rolls of 6-4, 4-6, 5-5), to get a result of .0967, or 9.67%. 9.67 is the new percentage of getting a ten on your second roll. The possibility on the third roll will be about 11.5%. Mathematically, this follows:

8.334% (initial 1/12 probability)
+9.67 % (initial roll subtracted from total rolls divided by three converted to a percent)
+11.50% (third probability)

29.504% (total probability of one of the three ESC's hitting the ATK)

Note this is only 3.83% less than the 1/3 probability of an ATK hitting an ESC. This means that the ATK has 1/4 of one number more chance of hitting the ESC, a ridiculously small amount. And now start figuring how many more ESC's you could buy with the 35IU ATK research cost. Or maybe how many extra IU's you could buy? Either way the percentiles speak for themselves.

In conclusion, the ESC possesses a last quality over the ATK. They do make better ships for conducting raids. (Hold on you impatient types and reserve your judgement of my sanity until I explain. If you're still not satisfied....)

It is true that an ATK can destroy 3 million in population per turn after it has eliminated a planet's defenses. But don't forget that you get three ESC's for one ATK and each of those ESC's is capable of destroying one million in population. Total destruction possible is therefore the same. With the ATK raiding, the defender only has to roll the correct number once for the ATK to be destroyed and the attack defeated. With a Squadron of ESC's, the defender has to roll the correct number three times! The attacker also has the option to break off the engagement or continue it, depend depending on his loses in proportion to the defender's. Because of the greater mobility of three ships over one, the attacker can remain in the star system until the defender is forced to divert reinforcements to the scene. In most cases, the attacker will still have enough firepower left over to run and raid the very systems where the reinforcements came from! Strategically done, these hit and run warfare tactics can be devastating and render the victim a minor factor for the rest of the game. So, why not the Escort? All things considered, many otherwise outstanding players are taken in by the Escort illusion.

Edward C. Cooper

TWO VIEWS OF THE FUTURE: STELLAR CONQUEST and STARFORCE

STELLAR CONQUEST (hereafter referred to as SC) and STARFORCE (SF) both approach the idea of a far flung stellar society from quite different view points. The differences lie not only in game mechanics but in the underlying philosophical assumptions without which the games would be nothing more than pieces of cardboard to move lifelessly about a flat playing surface.

Before we examine the philosophies, let us take a look at the more visible physical structures and rules of the games. Both games are quite well designed physically and operate under complex but logical rules.

SC and SF both have very visually appealing game components. In fact, I personally think the two games are tied, in that respect, for best in the entire game field. SC's map shows a "simulated 1BO type open galactic star cluster" while SF's main map is one of "74 star systems in a three-dimensional 'sphere' of space." All scientific jargon aside, the maps are eyecatchers.

SC's playing surface is a riot of bright and colorful stars scattered onto a thin, plastic sheet. SF's gameboard resembles nothing so much as the deep, purple blackness of space itself, speckled with the barest hints of star systems.

Both of these well designed maps have the conventional hex grid superimposed upon them. SF's hexes, called light-zulus, represent volumes of space one light year across. SC's hexes are planar distances of an eighth of a light-year. Here we have the first hint that the designers of these two games had two entirely different objectives in mind.

The SF player must relearn how to look at a map, in this case the map is not the complete territory, not by a long shot. The flat, SF map is really a sphere and must be visualized as such within the players' minds. Every hex on the map has a set number of other hexes (light-zulus) either above or below it. Take the innocent hex numbered 1214, for example. The hex, as pictured on the map, is 1214/0. Light-Zulu 1214/7 is seven light-years above the map's surface and Light-Zulu 1214/-7 would be seven light-years below. That particular Light-Zulu is in an area of the sphere which could be either nineteen hexes below or above the map.

SC's hexes are more conventional, and represent simple planar distance between the game's star systems. However, the games are attempting two different simulations. For SF to have used SC's conventional hexes would have been terrible. Had SC's designers tried to turn their own map into a "sphere" then the game would have wound up being unplayable.

SF is designed for the budding StarFleet Admiral (or telesthetic, but more about that later). Metagaming's SC is designed to appeal to the Galactic Emperor within us all.

Most STARFORCE is very tactical in nature. Even though the counters represent aggregations of StarShips, in most scenarios they move as one ship. The objectives are very basic, though complex in fulfillment. Each player attempts to engage the other in combat and capture the opponent's star systems SF would have been dull if a player has been asked solely to move his StarForces along a hexagonal grid towards their objectives. By having to plot a three-dimensional course through a mentally visualized sphere of space, the player gets a feeling unlike anything offered by an other game. When you play STARFORCE, you are as close to actually astrogating a StarShip through space as anyone, this poor century, is likely to come.

The SC player, however, has much more to worry about than the SF player. In STELLAR CONQUEST, you are attempting to explore new star systems, to develop previously explored ones, to develop technological capabilities within your Empire, to build ships and defenses even while you are thinking about maybe invading an opponent's worlds and, at the same time, worrying if he is going to invade you! If, in addition to all that, you would have to worry about plotting a course through a visualized sphere you would probably go space-happy, to borrow a term from Tom Corbett. This too, is realistic considering the implied status of the player as leader of a budding Empire. It is unlikely that Alexander the Great mapped out every single small unit in all action in all of his armies. No, in STELLAR CONQUEST you would not want to have some of the tactical details that are in STARFORCE. Likewise

players of STARFORCE have their hands full with tactics and could hardly hope to also have the depth of society-realism that is present in SC.

And, now, this brings us to our basic philosophical difference between the games.

I have already used the word "combat' in relation to the action in STARFORCE. Now, there is a lot of fighting that goes on in a typical scenario, but it is not combat as most game players would define that term. For one thing, no one is ever killed and nothing is destroyed.

Redmond Simonsen, STARFORCE's designer, has postulated a Twenty-Fifth Century society of star-goers based on the mental powers of what he terms "telesthetics." A telesthetic has the ability to open a "discontinuity window" by the power of her mind coupled with that of an intelligent machine race referred to as Gnostechs. This discontinuity window is what most people today would call teleportation. Simply put, a telesthetic (or telesthetics acting in unison) is the motive power of a Star Ship

Thus, in STARFORCE, Einstein is, at most, a fond memory. The StarForces do not travel through space, but jump in and out of the game's Light-Zulus. Thus, they are able to cover vast distances at a single "shift."

The telesthetics, however, are also empathic towards each other. "Every man's death diminishes me" and "Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee" are not empty poetic sayings to a telesthetic but simple, heart rending reality. Should a telesthetic kill another, it would be almost like suicide.

When two StarForces meet, the telesthetics aboard broadcast mental energies at each other. The loser in this contest literally is put to sleep. If they do not recover in time, the opposing telesthetics may randomize their ship and throw it through a discontinuity window half way across the sphere of known space.

Then, once the opposing StarForces are wiped out, or thrown away, the invader fights the star system's protective StarGate (which might also have been fighting alongside the defending StarForces.) Aboard the Gate are more telesthetics, enough that it takes a superiority of at least three StarForces to attack a Gate with any true hope of victory. Once the invaders have telesthetically put the Gate asleep, the world below is open for occupation.

At no time are StarForces destroyed, nor are telesthetics killed (but for one scenario which involves a vicious xenophobic race from beyond the sphere). All the systems and races (there are three; human, L'chal-dah and Rame) are dependent on their own telesthetics for transportation, and the telesthetics say that killing is a no-no. Should they be ordered to kill, they would simply refuse.

Most of the scenarios are not actually wars, not as we think of them today. These Twenty-Fifth century societies do not fight for space nor out of irrational hatreds. They fight basically to decide opposing theories of government. I have the impression that, if death were likely in their wars, there would have been (be?) less scenarios to play. Wars divorced from death, made bloodless although still monetarily expensive, seem seem to take less of a reason to become motivated.

STELLAR CONQUEST, on the other hand, seems more like the world today. Now this is not to say whether that is bad or good. It is simply that in STELLAR CONQUEST, things are happening for more immediately comprehensible reasons. Some players will say this is good, others not. Herein, I think, you have a basic schism within Science Fiction circles. Some people in Science Fiction feel that extrapolation must be very tightly organized from the base of today's society. Others feel that the only good Science Fiction lifts the reader into wholly new and strange realms. I'll save my own opinion for a few paragraphs in order to further describe STELLAR CONQUEST.

The SC player is presented with an entirely different playing milleau from the SF player. In STELLAR CONQUEST, laid out beautifully before you, beckoning you onward, is an entire unexplored cluster of stars. Is the star ahead of you hiding a planetary paradise, or a heavy mineral hell-hole? There's only one way to find out, to send your scouts ahead. Once you have found suitable worlds, or before if you want to risk it, you give your Colony Transports their orders as to what star to head for.

You set up your first colonies and you begin to develop them like mad, all the time continuing to explore the other stars in the cluster. You can use the Industrial output of each colony for a myriad of things; you may build ships, more factories, or contribute to your Empire's technological research. You, leader of your Empire, have to weigh each decision carefully.

If you expand too fast, and neglect to do your technological research you will, very likely, be dooming yourself to early extinction as your opponent sooner or later will swoop down on you with ships the like of which your primitive technology can only gasp at. Likewise, if all you do is technological research, by the end of the game you will have an Empire of genius with only a few Terran-type worlds to your credit and the dummy on the other side of the board will walk off with the honors.

Slowly, carefully, the experienced Stellar Conqueror will expand this sphere of influence star by star. All the time, he will build his technological capability and prepare himself for aggression or defense, whatever he deems to be best. Perhaps, instead of doing the research enabling you to build Dreadnaught class ships, you had better put those research funds into figuring how to build a missile base. Maybe, rather than buying that Dreadnaught you had your heart set on, you should purchase a Colony Transport vessel and emigrate a few thousand colonists from their homeworld to that new, green planet circling that newly explored G-Class star.

Meanwhile, your evil opponent is making his own untrustworthy Empire's plans.

In STELLAR CONQUEST, the players are locked into a limited cluster of stars. The winner is simply the one who, by the end of the game, has been able to maintain control over the most number of Terran and Sub-Terran planets. These limited resources lead to war, real and bloody war.

When two opposing Empires meet, they meet in a way that would be familiar to Patton, or Caesar, Napoleon or Rommel. They fight, and they fight to the death. Nothing better emphasizes the underlying differences between STARFORCE and STELLAR CONQUEST than the following short quote from the STELLAR CONQUEST rules pamphlet:

> "The Conqueror may destroy the population and Industrial Units of a conquered colony on a one to one basis... during the Planetary Attack step. Each type of warship... may destroy on the following basis:
>
> For each Escort, 1 million population and 1 IU.
>
> For each Attack Ship, 3 million population and 3 IU.
>
> For each Dreadnaught, 5 million population and 5 IU."

In STELLAR CONQUEST we have a more recognizable form of warfare. People die, whole cultures may be destroyed.

I am sure that many players, at this point, are now trying to decide which game simulation is 'better,' the clean combat of STARFORCE or the more usual destructiveness found in STELLAR CONQUEST. I submit that neither one is 'better' than the other, not in this regard.

As mentioned earlier, there are two sides in a controversy now going on in the Science Fiction genre. One side wants to see clean and neat extrapolations and recognizable societies based on today's premises, such as STELLAR CONQUEST. Another group feels that Science Fiction should show something you have never seen before, make you think of something entirely new, as STARFORCE does, or the trip is not worthwhile.

Hogwash, or worse. The only way, in my mind, to judge a science fiction story or, as in this case, a game, is simply whether it succeeds or not within its own self-contained premises. Both these games are successes, in my book.

STELLAR CONQUEST does an absolutely beautiful job of transferring today's fallible humans to the stars. STARFORCE does an equally good job of creating what I think of as a 'new' kind of human and placing that 'new' being into a galactic framework.

So, I do not think you can judge these two games by comparing their underlying "stories" and asking which is the better, for they both hang together quite well within their own standards.

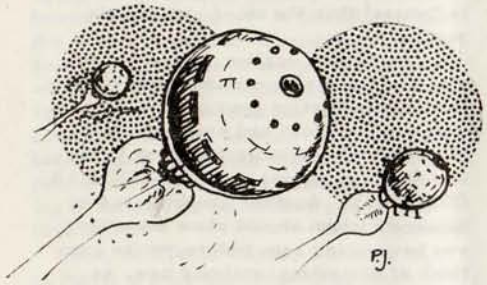
Perhaps, however, they will appeal to two different types of people. I would hope that this would not be true. After all, they are but simulations of events that have not happened and so I do not think they should be judged by present attitudes toward such things as war, violence, etc.

I know that I am able to play and enjoy them both equally. As to which game

game I will play when, it depends on my mood. Should I want to feel like Captain Shapiro directing an armada of ships through the hostile reaches of space then I'll pull out STARFORCE. If I should feel like being Lord Neil of Games, master and leader of an entire race, then STELLAR CONQUEST will be the game of the day.

If you like Science Fiction, if you like gaming, you need both of these games. ....so order now and have yourself a few megacenturies of fun.

Neil Shapiro
Jackson Hts., N.Y.



NOTICE...NOTICE

CONTRIBUTORS: Some of you have already been informed that we got mixed up in our compensation policy stated last issue. We had evaluated a 1/2¢ cash or 1¢ purchase credit per word option vs. a 1¢ cash or 2¢ per word credit. Since our tiny budget will have to be buying 20-30,000 words per issue by mid 1976, it made the 1/2¢ cash or 1¢ per word credit the only choice. Having then made the right decision we then blithely (and erroneously) transcribed 1¢ and 2¢ rates in TSG #2 in an attack of confusion.

So, it's 1/2¢ per word cash or 1¢ per word purchase credit for published contributions. If this isn't acceptable and anyone wants his article back, we'll send it (a postcard is sufficient). If we don't hear from you, we'll assume you still wish us to consider your material for publication. We pay upon publication

IGNORING EINSTEIN AND NEWTON OR "WHAT'S WRONG WITH AN H-BOMB"

One of the problems of many SF wargames is that the designers are either ignorant of, or forced to ignore, the laws of nature and the potentialities of modern weapons.

For example, JagdPanther Publication puts out a game called THE RIGELLIAN WARS. All the game is is a land wargame system set in space. Movement is so many hexes per turn--no mention of momentum at all. There are zones of control, fixed planets (as if they were cities), and star systems so close it is laughable.

Although RIGELLIAN WARS is admittedly at the far end of the scale, there are other games which screw up reality just as badly. LENSMAN's tactical section in the tournament game (where space ships fight "inert"--i.e., using normal physical rules) has no rules for momentum or the effects of gravity, but it does have (poor) rules for planetary motion. TRIPLANETARY, the best tactical board game around, has momentum and gravity. Unfortunately, the planets stay where they are. As a game can last for months (game time, not real time) this can produce a quite unrealistic situation. After all, in three months the Earth moves one fourth of its way in its orbit around the sun. Furthermore, as TRIPLANETARY tries to reproduce the technology and the solar system of the old Heinlein novels, you get further unrealistic situations (bases on Venus?). And the gravitational system, while good, doesn't allow the use of Hohmann orbits (though this is also due to the lack of planetary motion).

Another problem is the "blazer syndrome" where designers feel that, since they're doing a SF game, they ought to use wild weapons. So you get all sorts of trash like Magma beams, Photon torpedoes, Parasonars, Koz Gyrojet Pistols, and Gapper Zappers. What in blazes is wrong with a nuke? A 20-megaton warhead could kill any astronauts in an unshielded spacecraft within a sphere some 600 miles in diameter. Lead "stormcellars" and force fields designed by the developing science of Magnetohydrodynamics (MHD) will reduce this number somewhat, but nukes still show themselves to be very effective. Furthermore, it isn't easy to find things out there, either. To track a one meter square object about 10,000-50,000 miles out requires several radar stations, each requiring ten to twenty times the power output of the Grand Coulee Dam! Optical and infrared detection is even more hopeless than radar. Space is HUGE and ships are small specks in it. No board game can really give you the feeling of immensity needed for true realism.

In any case, using extrapolations of modern technology can give you just as good a game as using shields and phasers. Combat becomes a deadly game of hide-and-seek with radar, optics, and infrared devices trying to get past your camoflage and Electronic Counter Measure (ECM) to hit you with the sledgehammer blow of a nuke. This situation, not unlike that of submarine hunting, can be a very tense and exciting one. A good source book for this type of tactical simulaltion is Robert Sakeld's War and Space.

Finally, have you noticed that almost all SF games have Faster than Light (FTL) spaceships or some way to get them from one star to another quickly? While I would like to see FTL ships invented (preferably within my lifetime), there are few, if any, indications that they are possible (see Poul Anderson's article in the September, 1975 Galaxy for some interesting information about star travel). So why not design a game around STL spaceships?

Consider the possibilities. You have a game like SC, except that you'll need a moderator. In fact, it would be a good PBM type of computer game. Each player could start in a colonized system. The only knowledge you have of other systems is their radio messages, a yearly compendium of local events sent over the distances of space. Your information will be years, if not decades, old as the radio waves can move at only 300,000 kilometers a second. Then the moderator picks randomly, without informing any of the others, who is to be the aggressor. He falsifies his messages (though previous messages may give other players a hint of who he is) while building a warfleet of Bussard ramjets (which are fusion-propelled ships which use interstellar gas particles for fuel). He tries to attack secretly though the trail left by a ramship fleet may give him away to the defender's astronomers. If he succeeds, he'll ship back resources by laser-assisted photon lightsail, or convert them to a new religion, or whatever he desires. Meanwhile, the other players may decide to arm and aid the stricken defender. Variants may have refugees from one system try to find someplace else to take over, only to be pursued by the homesystem winners, who don't want to be attacked a century later by the same dudes who skipped out now. Lengthened lifespan, the effects of relativity, the difficulty of getting people to man your fleet, and new developments in science can all take a part. You know, it sounds so good I'll have to do it myself.

The point of all this is that you can make quite effective games without having to use ridiculous weapons and little known (i.e., undiscovered) laws of nature. Furthermore, the effort you put into increasing the realism of a game will prove to be effort well spent. Newton and Einstein can be a great help to a designer if he'll cooperate.

Scott Rusch

..NOTE TO GAME REVIEWERS..

A game review submitted to THE SPACE GAMER should include:

*address for ordering
*price
*designer (if available)
*list of components, including whether boxed or not and whether counters are mounted and/or die-cut
*short paragraph giving brief overview of what the game simulates and how it plays

Aside from the above items, you are on your own reactions. It helps potential buyers if you relate the games weak points as well as strong points. We do publish multiple reviews on games, so don't be afraid to call a weak game for exactly what it is. Just remember that even the worst games are likely to have good features or innovations. A game may not be worth a $12 price, but have interest and utility for many players at a $6 price.

LETTERS

The combination of science-fiction and gaming should prove irresistible to anyone like myself who has been a devoted addict to both for years. That the results have been hitherto barren may be an inescapable fact resulting from the following dilemma: either the future will be like the past (in which case why play SF games, since ordinary games will have the same action?) or it will be radically different (in which case the imaginative/comprehension difficulties will be formidable). A second, related problem is player interest: many people play one type of wargame or other because they are interested in the historical period it represents. The SF game designer must work up his "historical setting" from scratch, and all too often this aspect is weak and unconvincing, particularly because an inadequate link from the present to the future is provided (how did we get from HERE to THERE anyway?). The result is a phenomenon Mr. Bjorke noted in Issue #2 of TSG: just as there is an inferior brand of science fiction called "spaceopera" because it is only a cosmetic representation of some familiar reality, so are there far too many "space opera games."

SPI's STARFORCE: ALPHA CENTAURI is a benchmark example of what I would call a successful SF game. A concise, credible future representation is appended to the game, and the 3-D movement system captures the "vast reaches" of space. SC, on the other hand, falls into a class of games modelled on a resource exploitation theme (which involves the general objection that a society which could evolve spaceflight technology would have mastered the "fusion torch" technique of recycling materials, and therefore would have no need for resource exploitation). As a sample of the class, it is first rate in concept and execution, with the technological R&D forming a fascinating backbone for speculation. Only one question: what is the output value of a RIU, besides its capability to function on non-TR planets?

So I like your magazine, and I like your game. Additional things I would like to see: more hard extrapolative articles on the relationship of the present and future combat; games on Haldeman's THE FOREVER WAR, Blish's CITIES IN FLIGHT, Dickson's TACTICS OF MISTAKE, and Asimov's FOUNDATION TRILOGY, just to name a few. I would like to see less of fantasy games and articles. Without dispute to merits or definitions, I like SF and do not like Fantasy, and the latter is already provided with house journals.

As a parting shot: consider this: a respected (and fascinating) branch of SF is alternate history; anyone participating in a conventional simulation wargame is therefore working with alternate history, and thereby SF.

John Howard Oxley
Halifax, Nova Scotia

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...a few comments on DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS. I really feel that for a professional game publication, the rules are really badly organized. A few simple indexes would do wonders. The part of the rules dealing with combat are just impossible to understand; apparently they assume that you are familiar with the system already. A few worked out examples would probably clarify everything. I think that there is a lesson in this for all game designers, if you want to make sure that your rules are understandable, include worked out examples.

William B. Brogden
Port Aransas, TX

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We've been playing STELLAR CONQUEST which I consider to be one of the best game investments I've ever made.

A note of interest you may want to research or pass on to your readers. We found that after game turn 28, the game became somewhat confined--everyone had PFS everywhere worth having. Also, our production was far outstripping our needs. Therefore, we developed level 4 technology. One must have attained level 3 in all three fields to be eligible. Only RIU's may be spent on the research. Items available:

A. PFS Overload: 600 RIU
Allows a task force of 20 DN to simultaneously attack a PFS. Task force is lost in toto, but a roll of 1 on the die implodes the PFS. The implosion destroys the planet for the remainder of the game, together with everything the opponent had on it.

B. TF (Terra forming): 500 RIU
Allows ST and MT planets to terraform into TR. All ST must be completed before any MT may be. Cost per planet is its entire industrial output for one production year (minimum 120 IU/RIU for each step upgraded. (Eg. an MT can become ST one production year, and TR the following production year.)

These capabilities allow one to overcome, somewhat, the "luck of the draw"! We like it, so I'm passing it along in case others might also.

Larry H. Hester
Seattle, WA

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Please send me a subscription to TSG. I feel you people have the right editorial concept and one particularly wise in not trying to out S&T with a game in each issue, etc., but rather filling in part a reporter role in SF gaming. The content will have to improve (i.e. a smaller percentage of letters and larger amount of thoughtful, informative articles) if the magazine is to succeed or I am to review next year. However you do show promise.

Mark N. Lardas
Ann Arbor, MI

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Issue #2 is good. And the fact that you had sufficient subscriptions to warrant publication shows that there are enough people interested in SF to support a zine devoted to what is sometimes thought of as a fringe of wargaming. Actually SF gaming is probably the field most suited to development as there are infinite variations possible limited only to the imagination. Contemporary and historical games have covered almost all periods and conflicts with the major variations being those of game mechanics. SF has thousands of possible combinations for new conflicts in novels and stories already written and much more considering new stories and authors appear all the time. The only area in SF which hasn't been developed as well as it could is the tactical level combat such as that seen in Starship Troopers by Robert Heinlein or Under the Hammer by David Drake. Rumor has it that AH has bought the title rights for Starship Troopers but until there is a game from they by that title it is only rumor. But I for one will buy the game if it comes out for reasons of the title alone.

In Steve Cole's letter in issue #2 he shows a scale in which games are rated by comparing price and game playing time. Since in some cases games listed in the survey don't have game lengths in hours perhaps it's more appropriate that the games be considered by the overall rating and price instead since the enjoyment of the game (and therefore the value of the game) rests more on how much the player likes it than on how long he plays it (or struggles through it as the case may be).

In this way STARFORCE becomes .8 points per dollar while TRIPLANETARY becomes 1. point per dollar. SC shows .9 and RIGELLIAN WARS (last on the list for popularity) shows .87.

But this only serves to jumble up the survey even more and shows also that the price of the game is irrelevant. One can shuffle the columns in any manner which suits him. Also, DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS costs $10.00 and that perhaps is one of the better selling games around.

So by far the most important item on the survey is the game popularity as it shows how much the people rating it enjoyed the hours they spent playing it. Just because a game is longer doesn't necessarily mean it is better in much the same way that it is not necessarily better because it doesn't cost as much. I'd guess that a person expects a game that costs more to be better but even that flops sometimes (when you consider STARFORCE, for example). Anyway the whole point of a survey is to see how much raters like a game. STELLAR CONQUEST is a good game and people like it. It follows through that RIGELLIAN WARS isn't a good game because people don't like it enough to rate it high (this is also borne out by reviews of this game: reviewers don't like it either).

But here's to wishing you well and continued success at TSG and your games line, as it seems you are doing well and are enjoying it in the process.

Rick Pavek
SF Section Editor
Pursue and Destroy Magazine

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Nice going Thompson, issue #2 turned me on...

One thing I can't seem to understand is how some of your readers and readers of The General can have so many games. When I was playing regularly I never got

through the situations. We'd keep playing a given situation over and over until we evolved the optimum strategy. And then when The General introduced 12 more situations I was sure I'd never really run out of situations if new ones keep being introduced. But now that my pal has moved I've been having a great deal of difficulty really interesting mildly interested friends in learning these games. My next step is to buy a whole new game that these friends and I can learn together.

With so many SF wargames showing up (i.e. Lou Zocchi, A-H, TSR) one can't help but wonder at their quality and therefore I feel the game ratings are of value but 11 out of 13 getting an overall rating of 6 plus makes me again wonder about the objectivity of those responding. Ideally it should be (but can't work) a matrix evaluation of the relative value of each to each other. By the way, base numbers of respondents would help greatly in evaluating the ratings.

I wonder how much you appreciate Freas' cover. Honest I don't think I would have opened TSG if it wasn't for the cover! You can't judge...but a cover does create interest.

Bob O'Leary
Hyde Park, NY

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WANTADS

I would like to contact anyone interested in playing STELLAR CONQUEST in the Ann Arbor, MI area. Jim DeCook, 2877 Bellwood, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

Wanted: Spacegamers, wargamers, Diplomacy players in Ventura County get in touch. Mark Armstrong, 931 Camellia St., Oxnard, CA 93030, (805)485-7703.

STELLAR CONQUEST Tournament and Match Game Rating Service--For information, send $1.00 and SSAE to Layout Design Specialists, P.O. Box 485, Glenview, Illinois 66025.

(Subscribers may place ads of 25 words or less for one issue for 50¢)

SF GAMING NEWS/PLUGS

(The news section is a regular feature of TSG. We will print items on conventions, clubs, services (like PBM game moderating), or products that may be of interest to our readers. For best results you can prepare your own item with all essential details. Brevity helps.)

Royal Armies of the Hyborean Age, by Lin Carter and Scott Bizar. $6 from Fantasy Games Unlimited, Box 182, Roslyn, NY 11576.

This is a 64 page 8 1/2 x 11 booklet of wargame rules for the Robert E. Howard Conan stories. Also included are a data sheet for reference and a simple map of the Hyborean world. The rules are for miniatures play and seem well organized and detailed. They even include sources for appropriate figurines. Someone into miniatures is welcome to do a review.

Sorcerer, $9 boxed from SPI, 44 East 23rd st., NY, NY 10010.

This is billed as the game of magical conflict and can be played solitaire or is multi-player. With a multi-colored map for various magical interrelations and 400 counters SPI is clearly out to establish a place in the growing Fantasy games market. Reviews?

The Spartan #9, $3, a four issue sub is $9, from Spartan, Box 1017, Bellflower, CA 90706.

Issue #9 is worth mention because it contains Warlock, a 32 page elaboration of Dungeons & Dragons. That's a lot at 8 1/2 x 11 pages. They suggest you need D &D rules to get the most from their expansion.

Creative Computing--May/June '75, $1.50 from Box 789, Morristown, NJ 07960.

This issue contains some computer games of interest like Super Star Trek, ICBM, and Lunar. If you're into computer gaming this might be a good issue to sample to see if you want a one year, six issue sub for $8.

Diplomacy World, $4 for a four issue sub from Walter Buchanan, RR #3 Box 324, Lebanon, IN 46052.

This is the leading publication of interest for Diplomacy gamers. Heavy emphasis is on the well developed PBM Diplomacy activities.

Mark Leymaster, Box 2569, Boston, MA 02208.

Mark has a computer generated character list for use with Dungeons & Dragons or Tunnels and Trolls. A randomly generated list of 10 characters goes for $1 or custom characters at double the rate. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will get you some info and he invites correspondence.

Kelly Moorman, Box 7235, Monroe, LA 71201 offers to moderate Stellar Conquest by mail.

Kelly has several games going now and kindly sent the first six issues of his 'rag' Interstellar News which has news and messages on his games and SC. A sample is 15¢ and a SASE will probably get you info on his rates. It looks like IN will develop into something of interest to SC fans in general judging by the Edward Cooper article they ran and let us reprint. The play possibilities of SC are far from exhausted and an SC zine is sure to find that out fast.

The Battle of Five Armies, by Larry Smith, $4.50 from JMJ Enterprises, 7750 Margerum Ave #215, San Diego, CA 92120.

This is another game game based on material in the Lord of the Rings books. A review is carried in this issue.

Pursue and Destroy, six issue sub $7.50 from First Echelon Publications, Box 6113, Ft. Bliss, TX 79906.

This is a newer wargaming magazine that will also cover some s-f. Issue #5 for December will be an all s-f issue. They are offering a B&W reproduction of the cover for $1.50 and it's available now.

Third Millenia Inc., Last issue we reported that to the best of our knowledge TMI was defunct. Since then we have found out that retailer are still having orders filled. We still don't have any hard info but apparently there is still some activity. Their games are still available from Lou Zocchi.

Lou Zocchi, 1513 Newton Dr., Biloxi, MS. Lou sells almost every wargame, s-f included, in print and puts out a catalog you can get by request. It makes an excellent reference source and a convenient one stop shopping place. You may have to wait awhile for it to arrive because they go bulk but it's worth it.

Galaxy II, from Brett Tondreau, 5536 Kester Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91411.

Brett reports his major rewrite of the Galaxy II computer program about finished. New games should be able to begin in the near future. Rules are $2 first class, $1.90 third class. Introductory notes are 35¢ including a sample print-out from a game. Cost per turn varies according to how much you do. $1 is average, but 50¢ to $3 is a realistic range. This is the most detailed computer game available we know of.

TSG #2 FEEDBACK

Over a hundred feedback forms from issue #2 were received. Since that's less than half of the number we received for issue #1, we decided our readers don't like the form bound in the magazine. So, each issue will have a separate feedback and order form. We're also going to drop rating the Feedback Results, Wantads , and Game Ratings. These are service items, not entertainment, and it really doesn't matter how they rate. It'd make as much sense to rate the grade of paper or the folding and stapling. Thanks for your feedback. We can't go wrong with your king of help.

Item	8&9 1,2,3 Votes/Votes	Avg.
News/Plugs	37/1	7.33
SC Update	30/3	7.06
Where We're Going	26/2	6.78
Tannish	28/10	6.22
D&D: Pudewa	18/4	6.20
D&D: Waddell	20/7	6.00
Game Rates	11/6	5.82
Editorial	11/7	5.81
Letters	13/9	5.77
Feedback	7/7	5.63
Wantads	7/13	5.32
Over-all	27/2	6.91

TUNNELS AND TROLLS: A REVIEW OF SORTS

There is so much to say about this game that I hardly know where to start. It is true that TUNNELS AND TROLLS was inspired by DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, and resembled the earlier game in many ways, but it also differs importantly in both conception and playing style. In many ways T&T is a simpler game. It is certainly not as statistically rigorous in its treatment of characters and situations as D&D. (Example armor in T&T has a given weight and does not depend on a character's size or body weight.) T&T utilizes ordinary 6-sided dice for everything, studiously and deliberately avoiding complications like 20-sided, 12-sided, and tetrahedral ivories. As a game, T&T takes itself less seriously, and thereby tends to move along more quickly than D&D. T&T also draws more heavily on the imagination of the players and a little less on the genius of the Dungeon Master to make the game work. There are several major differences between the two games, and I want to briefly mention some of them in the remainder of this review.

1. There is no sexist bias in T&T. Female characters come out exactly as created by the dice--not reduced in size and strength by an arbitrary fraction just because they are female.

2. Character creation: In T&T one creates ones characters the same as in D&D (by rolling 3 dice) but there are only 6 major attributes: strength, intelligence, luck, constitution, dexterity, and charisma. Each of these attributes is very important to the character's abilities. For example, luck (which replaces wisdom) determines what a character's saving roll will be in any dangerous situation, and also whether or not the character will be able to find hidden doors or objects without the use of magic. Intelligence (IQ) determines the number of languages a character can learn, and how potent the magic he/she can handle. Dexterity determines whether or not one can use certain weapons like the morning-star, and also how accurate one is with missile weapons, plus being an indicator of general clumsiness. Constitution determines how many hits can take before being slain. And charisma is both an indicator of beauty and leadership. T&T characters are also of slightly different types than D&D characters. Instead of having clerics, there are rogues (modeled on the Gray Mouser and Cugel the Cleaver). Rogues have the ability to both fight like a warrior and use spells like a magic-user. But they are limited in that they can never rise beyond the 7th level, and they must be taught their spells by some well-disposed magician. Magicians are also different from their D&D counterparts in that they know many more spells than a D&D magician and can use them repeatedly, but in ordinary circumstances they cannot fight well; and they may exhaust or even kill themselves by using too much magic. Then there is a third difference in that T&T allows for a wider range of possible character types including men, elves, dwarves, hobbits, half-creatures (half-giant, half-troll, half-orc, etc.) goblins, trolls, orcs, ogres, or were-creatures of your choice

3. Weapons and Conflict: D&D conflict is a blow by blow description of the battle. T&T conflict is (usually) a melee in which all the combatants do their worst, dance around hacking and dodging, and then net the damage to one party or the other is evaluated at a given moment (after the dice roll by both sides of the combat). (Of course, there are many exceptions to the melee style of combat wherein damage can be done to both sides simultaneously, but the D.M. has to set those situations up specially.) T&T fighters (and monsters) get a bonus in combat for such factors as excess strength, luck, or dexterity, which may well tip the battle one way or another. Generally, monsters are most powerful on their first combat turn (1 game turn representing 10 minutes of game time may be subdivided into 5 combat turns (of possibly varying lengths of time though assumed to average 2 minutes)). Combat is a straight forward comparison of numbers rolled (plus adds and modifying circumstances) wherein the person or party on the losing end of the comparison takes the difference in hits. It is not based on the probability of a blow scoring a hit and doing damage. Various weapons (sword, crossbow, morning-star) are rated for different numbers of dice and require different strengths and dexterities to use them successfully. T&T includes 6 pages of weapons tables to allow characters to express their individuality and also find the best weapon for them, and the tables include some rather unusual items such as bolas, blow-guns, and bagh-nakhs.

I could go on for many pages pointing out more differences between the two games, but the format of the game instructions really says it all. D&D is very professionally done, with three booklets and a box, and it costs a small fortune. T&T looks more like a good fanzine. St. Andre takes a personal tone with the reader as if explaining it to your face. His explanations are not always perfectly clear, but if you read carefully and follow things step by step, understanding will come to you because you will probably duplicate the original thinking that led to the formation of such a rule. Whoops, excuse me! St. Andre insists that he doesn't give any rules--just principles and guidelines to base your own thinking on. One of the big principles of the whole thing is that D.M. decides what is right for his/her own dungeon.

I want to say a word about the art. It is mostly by a Phoenix fan artist named Rob Carver, and it ranges from the gorgeous to the ridiculous--mostly the latter. The cartoon to illustrate the magical spells are very droll, and the portrait of St. Andre captures his very soul. The current (2d) edition also has a fine front cover by Liz Danforth, a femme artist whose pen and ink style reminds one of Aubrey Beardsley, Alicia Austin, or Cathy Hill. (If none of those names ring a bell with you, you're not a fantasy art fan.) She has also done the art for the supplement (just out from Flying Buffalo for $1) and is doing art for Ken's new variant--MONSTERS! MONSTERS! which game uses monsters for protagonists and humans for foes. It's perverse!

T&T has been sold from coast to coast, but is still most popular in Phoenix, where it has become the official game of the organized SF club there. It is very playable, and a lot of fun--great for stretching the old imagination. I recommend it for fantasy fans who are not purists, and who do not necessarily believe a game's quality depends on its cost.

Brant Bates
Scottsdale, AZ

STAR PROBE REVIEW

Interested in a game that offers somethings different in the way of SF conflict situations? Has the ultimate in detail, a game you win more by skill than luck, a game the avid gamer can really sink his teeth into?

STAR PROBE may be just what you are looking for. Played on a map containing some 2,000 star systems pictured in a 3D section of space representing 150 light years by 100 light years by 115 light years. STAR PROBE is massively detailed game of colonial expansion with players competing more against the random unknowns of the universe than among themselves. Player vs. player conflicts are possible, but the unadvisable as the possibility of encountering fearsome life forms and hostile natives is all too great. Fighting wars cannot only cripple a player's explorations, but costs him a fortune to finance as well.

Players/explorers begin the game with a minimum grant from their respective governments. From this they must purchase such items as naval personnel, supplies and food for the proposed duration of the voyage, specialty teams which are subdivided in to Contact and Scientific teams, Marine groups, Repair Crews, missiles, fuel slugs, etc. Obviously the explorer cannot purchase all he needs. Therefore he must plan his mission carefully and only purchase necessities. One of the basic ideas of the game is for him to make the most out of what little he has. This makes the game a challenging contest of players confronting unknown civilizations and adjusting his plans and resources to fit the specific situation. His success depends upon his foresight and planning.

The victor is that explorer who has managed to gain the most in terms of cash and materials through his explorations while losing the least. This is why wars are avoided, unless the predicted cash gain will surpass the cash expenditure. STAR PROBE comprises a five year period divided into 60 game turns with each turn measuring out a period of one month. It is the first in a trilogy of game/rules and lays the path to successive volumes where players will enlarge the sphere of influence obtained in STAR PROBE into vast Stellar Empires, with players having the freedom to do such things as design their own ships, detail

adventures with strange lifeforms and unknown civilizations, explore the remains of vanished empires and engage in cosmic confrontations of Imperial Fleet proportions.

Perhaps the greatest advance between STAR PROBE and other games is the fact the game can be shortened or extended indefinitely according to the players wants without losing the realism and structure of the game. Another unique aspect of STAR PROBE is it possesses the capability of being played solo with no loss of flavor of challenge. All aplayer has to do is decide on a time period for the game to last, and what conditions will determine if the won. For example, a win can be based on surpassing a set number of Megarons (the monetary unit), on discovering a source of fuel or some other item needed by your government, or completing a course of exploration without sustaining losses above a certain percentage. For advanced solo games, players may combine the requirements mentioned or add others to determine their chances of winning.

STAR PROBE has something of interest to everyone.

Edward C. Cooper
Riverside, CA

SF&F GAME RATINGS

Response to the ratings from issue #2 was good. Over 400 separate ratings now give a reasonable base for comparing games, especially among better known games. The ratings give hours to play an average game, complexity of the game, physical quality of game components and overall rating of how you liked the game. The overall category is meant to include things like playability and such in relation to players personal preferences. The scale is from zero to ten.

Game	Hours	Complexity	Physical Quality	Over All
Dungeons and Dragons	6.60	7.63	7.55	8.46
Stellar Conquest	5.99	6.95	7.34	8.33
Lensmen	8.50	7.41	6.70	7.28
Triplanetary	3.62	5.33	7.90	7.24
Starforce	3.63	6.93	7.73	7.17
Star Probe	5.86	7.41	5.93	6.81
Star Lord	3.64	4.88	6.36	6.64
Alien Space	2.63	4.06	5.28	6.35
Siege of Minas Tirith	3.56	4.12	6.33	6.20
4000 A.D.	2.26	3.79	7.26	5.49
Helms Deep	2.28	4.06	5.14	4.77
Battle of Five Armies	3.00	3.50	4.68	4.74

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE GAME WAR OF THE WORLDS II

WAR OF THE WORLDS II is a half-hearted attempt by one of the "third world" war game manufacturers to create a playable SF game on a planetary-system scale. Various starfaring races independently approach an uninhabitated, resource rich, star system and eventually squabble over it.

After close inspection of the game, you have the feeling you are holding a "gotta-beat-the-deadline-or-get-fired" type effort. The only thing to brag about is the physical quality of the playing pieces. They are large, high quality stock, with rounded corners for easy handling. Unfortunately, too small an allocation of the total budget went for the remainder of the game.

The art work depicting the various starships and planetary ships can best be described by the comment of a friend watching a game recently played. "It looks like the sewage plant and trolley cars are beating the tinkertoy and turtle shells."

The game mechanics are quite simple with little attention paid to the laws of physics, economics, or military science. The planets do, however, manage to rotate around the star in epicycle fashion.

Complete destruction of the enemy is impossible, winning is improbable, stalemate is almost inevitable, and boredom is sure to set in. I unloaded the game at a small fraction of its cost to a rather dense, now ex-acquaintance and he surely got less than he bargained for.

David M. Redding
Houston, Texas

GAME REVIEW: SIEGE OF MINAS TIRITH

The SIEGE OF MINAS TIRITH is the best of the Middle Earth games that this reviewer has had the pleasure of playing STM actually portrays the Battle of Pelennor Fields in addition to the siege of the city. (For those unfamiliar with the Lord of the Rings, Pelennor Fields is an open area around the city of Minas Tirith.)

Minas Tirith, the major city of Gondor, occupies only a small portion of the mapsheet used for the game. The city is represented by three concentric rings of walls (as described in the trilogy there were actually seven concentric rings of walls but this number was reduced for game purposes). Pelennor Fields is a large area with terrain features that are suitable for defense and surrounded by a defensive wall, the Rammas Echor. The river Anduin marks the boundry for the starting positions of the antagonistic forces. The army of Mordor (the black army) commanded by the Lord of the Nazgul begins east of the river, while the city of Minas Tirith and the Gondorian army are west of the river. A narrow band of seven hexes represent the only portion of the river suitable for a cross river assault. On the west bank is the advance guard for the forces of Gondor. They, of course, attempt to repel the cross river assault.

The forces of Gondor are divided into three parts: the advance guard at the river, a defensive group behind the Rammas Echor, and a garrison in the city. No additional troops can be sent to help the advance guard until the black army has landed troops on the west bank of the river. Likewise, no garrison troops can leave the city until the black forces have penetrated the Rammas Echor.

The black army is very powerful, but faces a couple of problems in winning the contest. First, the army of Gondor can take advantage of a number of terrain features that will facilitate their defense. These include ridges, forests and defensive walls. Secondly, the army of Gondor has two relief columns that arrive late in the game. The Riders of Rohan under Theoden arrive in the north on game turn 19, while Aragorn arrives with help from the south on turn 21. Once these reinforcements arrive, it becomes very difficult for the Lord of the Nazgul to lead his troops to victory. He must win early or face likely defeat.

To facilitate his attack, Nazgul also gets reinforcements, including regular troops, two oliphaunt units (an oliphauant is a large elephant), and Grond the Hammer of the Underworld. (Grond is a giant battering ram, the only thing capable of breaking the Great Gate of the City.) The game is a classic example of a powerful army attempting to overrun a hard-pressed defense before aid arrives.

The physical quality of the game is good. The map is on beige paper and printed in three colors. Unit counters are neatly made. Line drawings of different weapon types represent different units within the army (e.g. clubs, bows, schmitars). Orcs, trools, Easterlings, Riders of Rohan, and others make up the counter mix. Special leader units exist, and morale rules simulate leader values effectively. Morale is important and, unlike some morale rules, the ones in SMT do not gum up the game mechanics or add to play time.

An optional scenario includes the use of the Ring of Power by forces of Gondor. The use of the Ring increases the likelihood of beating off the attack by Mordor, so long as control is maintained over the force of the ring. If control is lost it becomes more difficult for Gondor to defend itself. If the ring is captured by the forces of Mordor, an immediate and overwhelming victory is gained by them.

All in all, the Siege of Minas Tirith is a good game and is faithful to the trilogy. The rules allow replication of the events of the trilogy without forcing the outcome. SMT can be played in competition as well as solitaire and is well worth the $5 cost.

SMT is designed by Richard Jordison and is available from Fact and Fantasy Games, Box 1472, Maryland Heights, MO 63043. Larry Pound

Note to Buyers of THE YTHRI

In THE SPACE GAMER issue #2 the ad for THE YTHRI mentioned record sheets and 288 play counters. In the major revisions to the game the record sheets were eliminated and the number of counters was reduced to 242. So, that's why...

GAME REVIEW: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES

THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES is abattle described by J. R. R. Tolkien in The Hobbit. The battle occurs at the foot of Lonely Mountain, between two ridges projecting out from the mountain. The ridges form a "V", with the apex of the "V" at the base of the mountain. At the apex there is an entryway leading to a cavern, called simply "under the mountain."

The allied army (made up of men, elves, and dwarves) must defend the entryway and protect themselves from attack by the evil orcs and worgs (wolves). If by game turn 40, the evil forces can destroy all the allied army, or control the gateway and under the mountain and destroy half the allied army, it is a victory for evil.

The allied forces occupy the ridges at the outset of the game with the dwarves and men on one ridge and the elves on the other. Although they occupy a good defensive position for self-protection, they have to be careful that they do not get defeated in detail as the halves of the army are separated by some distance. Also, the defensive position occupied leaves the middle of the valley open for penetration by the orcs and worgs. If the valley is not closed off, the gateway to under the mountain is left virtually unprotected.

The orcs and worgs outnumber the allies, and get additional strength as the game progresses. It is difficult for the allies to ward off the increasing strength of the evil forces, particularly if the leader of the evil forces does not allow himself to be tied down to a slugfest. By using a portion of his forces to tie down the allies, and another portion to attempt flanking movements, the orc/worg player can make it very difficult for the allies. The allies, on the other hand, must insure that they are in a position that will take advantage of the terrain to prevent flanking efforts and to minimize the number advantage of the other side by preventing their full deployment.

There are three scenarios to THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES. The first represents the battle that the game is named after. That scenario has two setups described in the rules. The first is the "historical" setup (just described) and the second is a free setup by the allies.

The second scenario is one where the dwarves fight the men and elves. (This scenario was also drawn from The Hobbit. In the book this battle was avoided primarily because of the arrival of the orc/worg army and the joint effort of the allies to dispose of the evil forces.) In this scenario the men and elves attempt to prevent reinforcement from reaching the dwarves under the mountain.

Finally, there is a scenario where the dwarves fight Smaug the dragon. The Smaug counter is a 100-100-15 and the dwarves are represented by 2-2-4 counters (attack, defense, movement, respectively). The outcome of this battle is rarely in doubt.

The mapsheet is beige with black printing and a little bit of blue. The markings indicating terrain features are somewhat confusing, and one type of terrain is not explained on the terrain effects chart. Unit counters are white for the allies and black (what else?) for the bad guys. The combat resolution system requires a 10-sided die or a 10 chit system, while morale checks require a standard die (neither of which is provided). The morale system is very cumbersome and in my opinion, detracts from the game. A morale check is required of each stack after combat, and as there are many stacks of units, this procedure is time consuming and unwieldy. There is an additional morale check on the armies as a whole. It appears that disregarding the morale system has little influence on the outcome of the game.

The game has a few innovative features. For example, a unit on a slope but not on a road hex has a chance of sliding down the slope and being destroyed or disorganized. Another unique feature is a units capability of rolling rocks down a slope on enemy units below them.

All in all, the game if fair, but the total impression is not enhanced by the colors used for the unit counters or the way the terrain features are drawn.

Larry Pound
Chadron, Nebraska

REVIEW OF ALIEN SPACE

ALIEN SPACE is an exciting science fiction game of future battles in space. The concept of the game was taken from the t. v. show Star Trek. Many of the components are similar to the things used on the program.

The game includes eight different types of spacecraft, each with its own special weaponry. There's the Rojun, with its Transperenators and Magma Beams; the Zeron has Stalker Pods, the Earth Ship, containing Proton Mines and Torpedoes, and many other types of ships. Each ship has blazers, life support systems, shields, and each ship may move at warp speed (the speed of light) except the Rojun which moves at sub-light speed.

One of the main drawbacks of the game, though, is that it has no map. You need an area of at least eight feet square. The players move by inches, which also may bother some people.

The game is quite fun, even with these set=backs. It is played with pure skill, no die rolling involved.

The moves are simultaneous, so you have to try to outguess your opponents too. Two to eight people can play, the more people playing the funner it is.

The prices of the games are as follows (there are different amounts of ships in each game):

32 Ship Armada Size Game ($13.25)
24 Ship Armada Size Game ($10.50)
16 Ship Armada Size Game ($7.50)
8 Ship Scout Size Game ($4.50)

The game is by Lou Zocchi, 1513 Newton Drive; Biloxi, MS 39532.

Steve West
Warner Robins, GA

..Note to Art Contributors..

The most easily reproducible illustrations are line drawings in black or red inks. The photography to make off-set plates for reproduction sees blue as almost transparent, so avoid blue. Shading effects, greys, etc. will reproduce to some degree, but make shadings fairly heavy. Fixatives may be used as long as they aren't too "glossy" which may cause glare blanks in copy.

Reimbursement for illustrations varies with the type, size, and our use of the art work. You will get either cash or purchase credit for everything we print.

A DIVERSION: ELDON TANNISH
(Part III)

Synopsis: Eldon Tannish is a gifted young computer gamer competing in the North American Convention (NORCON), a masters level game tournament some fifty years from now. "The Game" is a super-sophisticated computer moderated simulation that pits six to twelve gamers in a fantastic variety of futuristic scenarios. Players must master full scale stellar empires, limited small unit actions, and non-combat competitions.

The Game is conducted with players in separate cubicles, each with holographic display tanks and hard copy computer terminals for decision inputs. The holograph displays game actions in symbolic miniature with appropriate alpha numeric reference data. Each gamer also has his own pocket-sized computer for making notes, doing analysis, and storing the standard procedures and plans each gamer develops during his career. Personal computers are regulated in size, capacity, and performance so no player gains advantage.

In the first two installments Eldon successfully passes cuts in qualifying games to gain final competition. His loner style is somewhat out of place in the negotiation-dependent, multi-player environment, but his play is steadily improving. He hopes to become a master and be able to live from winnings, something achieved by only a few hundred masters level players. In this future, gamers have the same status as a tennis or golf pro now and prize monies are substantial. Noted gamers also serve as paid consultants for organizations who've come to prize their synergistic problem analytic and decision-making skills.

As we left Eldon in TSG #2, he was launching a course of action in his first masters level match that would try to take advantage of a coalition squeeze being put on him. The coalition leader, Bulmar Denholt, was becoming a stumbling block to his progress, but Eldon felt he could turn the tables as he so often did.

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Eldon stood immobile from exhaustion staring into the holographic display. Frowning lines of concentration and beaded sweat in the air conditioned player cubicle rendered his visage gauntly

aged.

Tricked! Damn Bulmar's duplicity! Damn the game and his nearly disastrous eagerness. Damn, Damn, Damn echoed in Eldon's skull as tension failed to drain at game's end. He hadn't been tricked like that since he was green. Turning a player's own clever plans against him was a difficult maneuver with Eldon persistently the perpertrator rather than victim.

His legs eased drained flesh back into the seat without awareness. Initial shocked rage was peaked and already fading. Eldon was a calm person. But, aggressive, competitive anger at self and opponents was not unfamiliar. He knew human nature well enough to realize competitiveness and emotional involvement were essential to a master gamer. He worked to direct and use rather than supress an internal psychology that could be only slowly changed.

Anger remained but analytical admiration for Bulmar's play began to join it. Tricked he was, and beaten perhaps, but learn, improve, and evolve he certainly would do. The game period ended and cubicles were emptying, but Eldon remained seated, isolated in thought.

Bulmar had beaten him by predicting his reaction to a sure trap set by Bulmar and his allies. Eldon had apparently turned the tables enough for the style to be predictable, especially when coupled with a loner's game. Bulmar's trap within a trap had sprung close to the end Little reaction was possible. Eldon had probably lost and been eliminated from the tournament.

Eldon slowly stood and stretched. So be it. If defeat were the golden opportunity to learn and improve, fate had handed him a block buster. If he were still in, possible, given the wildly confused fifteen-minute game's end, he'd have to devise a whole new style of play by morning. If Bulmar could read him, so could others. Changing play style wasn't his style, but adapting was. Could he change under pressure despite a comfortably maverick loner's role?

Calming mental exercises complete, he left the cubicle to walk the concourse. He wanted to view results in the gamers' lounge, but elimination or survival was less important than grokking this fresh experience in full. More than anything else he'd wanted masters status from this tournament. The winnings would go a long way toward freeing him to be a full-time competitor.

He paced slowly, insensitive to the heavy, excited crowds of fans and gamers. Today's match had a capacity 45,000 viewing games on the central arena's sixty-foot holograph. As many as twenty million would have watched simultaneous holocasts to the western hemisphere. The Game's vast following was greatly helped by action-packed holographic recreations generated by computer. Primitive gamers would have been stunned to know the fees a game hero earned for endorsing clothes and toiletries.

Pausing in an eddy of people near Center's main entrance, Eldon became aware of a game's monitor pushing his way through the crush. An elimination notice so soon! Eldon wordlessly pocketed the message plug and strode outside to the pedestrian walk level above the traffic. A gymnasium in convenient walking distance had been a pleasant find on his first day in New Lavegas.

Eldon's deep concentration made him unaware of the time lapse of walking, changing, and sweat-suited jogging. No one else paced this supper hour with him on the gym's quarter mile roof track--legs rhythmically pumped pounding feet. Two miles at seven minutes gradually increased to a five minute pace for the final two miles. He believed in mental training as one believed in gravity. But, the strained work of physical exercise yielded a kinesthetic joy undiminished by pained straining.

Jogging finished, Eldon wandered down to the gym's work out areas. Despite the work at running he warted something else to concentrate . The floor was nearly deserted except for isolated exercisers. At the far end, dark curly hair. Alba? Eldon strode down to the other end. Sure enough, Alba was working her way through a modified karate exercise.

"Hi, Alba," Eldon greeted.

A nod was her acknowledgement of him.

"Want to work out?" asked Eldon.

Alba finished her series and said, "I'll have to go get my suit. Do you have one?"

"No," responded Eldon, "but I can get a center." Technology had affected even karate. The suits they needed were intricate webs of padding and sensors. The padding allowed workouts at near full speed with actual impacts being widely distributed. You could get bruised, but it took an expert deliberately trying to break a bone. The sensors could be set to read out impacts and other data to personal computers for scoring and analysis.

Back with suits, Alba weighted hers to simulate 1.15 gravity and set the tension she'd have to fight at 5% above normal. She was a rated amateur and Eldon would need the edge to make the workout competitive.

"San Francisco convention?" asked Alba.

"Fine here," Eldon agreed, "neither of us needs an injury. Sure you don't want to spot me a few points margin?"

"You should be paying me a fee for a lesson," smiled Alba sardonically.

They circled slowly working for position. In, out; thrust, grab, and jab. The pace gradually quickened as both earnestly set themselves to score. They worked the whole of the mat for better than an hour. Despite her compensation Alba still out-scored Eldon with little trouble. Eldon only studied karate for the concentration and coordination. He tried to win when he worked out but he mostly wanted exercise and competition. He rarely worked with someone as expert as Alba and was extending himself to the utmost.

With Alba sitting on his chest for the umpteenth time, Eldon called it quits. "Now if you'll carry me to the showers, I'll be through for sure," quipped Eldon.

"As if it'd be worth hauling your overmuscled carcass anywhere," said Alba as she got up, but conceded, "You're getting better even if your cunning did slow you. Let's shower."

"You still in The Game?" he asked, lathering his hair a few moments later.

"Yah," admitted Alba, "by the skin of my teeth. I'm already farther along than I'd expected. How'd you do?"

"Don't know yet," he admitted with some surprise. "I got my message plug and stuck it in my pocket. Bulmar, you know Bulmar don't you, he trapped me good and I think I'm out."

"I don't know what to make of you," Alba said. "I couldn't have waited to find out. You must have really had your ego shaken up to do that."

"Not really. Well, some, 'cause I felt pretty stupid. It just made me realize Bulmar was predicting me. I'm patterning and even if I survived, I'm in bad shape. The computer's sure to keep me in nine to twelve player brawls where I'm worst and I've got to change my style or stand no chance."

"Why don't you find out?"

Eldon ruffled his hair with a towel and walked over to his pants. Inserting the message plug in his ear and waited for the ident check. Ten point seven percent and a sixth finish made him just barely still in the game. Bulmar had trapped him, but had underestimated just how much covert activity Eldon had going.

"I'm in," he said with a surprised smile.

"Let's go eat," Alba said, as excited as she ever got, which wasn't excited at all. They dressed and walked back to the Games center.

"If you've become predictable, you're in bad shape for sure. Have you thought of a Problem Analysis," she inquired.

"Not for two years," he responded. "It might help." "Might" was the key word. Problem Analysis was a full analysis of ability and past games done by The Games' computer, but directed by the player. You could find out an awful lot, but you had to ask the right questions.

"Well?"

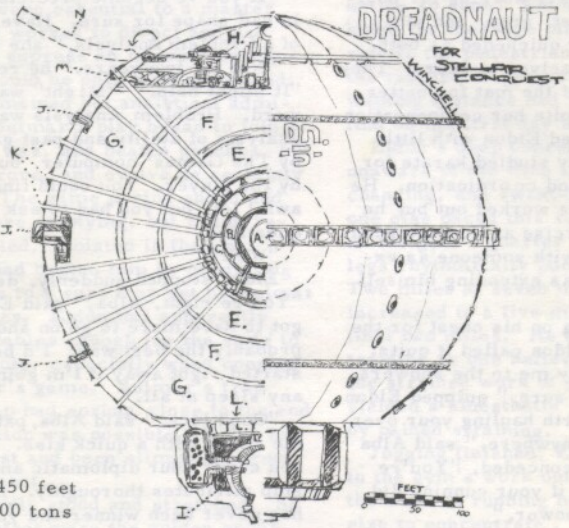
Eldon stopped suddenly, deciding. "You're right, Alba," said Eldon. "I've got to have more to go on and that's probably the best way. I'd better get started right away if I'm going to get any sleep at all."

"Good luck," said Alba, patting him on the cheek with a quick kiss. "Be sure you cover your diplomatic and leadership attributes thoroughly. A pure loner has never been winner and you're about as pure as you can get."

Eldon went to find a monitor and get a cubicle for his Problem Analysis session. He had four hours before midnight and needed every minute . Changing your style in the middle of a tournament usually destroyed a player's carefully balanced play processes. Eldon felt he had to change if he'd become predictable Better start immediately even if he couldn't finish high, he wouldn't anyway if he could be trapped.

Settling down at a cubicle terminal, he began setting up an initial run assuming his diplomatic skills and reliance were upped 50% with all other abilities constant. Alba was an excellent group player and her advice was good, if infrequent.....

Note to consistancy freaks on Dreadnaught. Yes, I know that a matter/antimatter 8MA drive is impractical (you need to convert 33,000 tons of mass into energy to accelerate only 1000 tons of mass, the photon blast would be ten times the power the sun gives to the earth so if one millionth of that reaches the vessel as waste heat it would immediately evaporate, etc., etc.) But the other "respectable" drive lying around was the Bussard Ramjet (if you haven't heard of it read Tau Zero by Poul Anderson) and that has to be cylindrical. Note the sphere has practically no blind spots. You could have a Bussard "ferry" to cart DN's to the star but that would needlessly complicate the game. Oh, well! .....Winchell Chung



Diameter: 450 feet
Mass: 50,000 tons

A) artificial gravity and gyros
B) ship control
C) crew quarters and misc.
D) gunnery control
E) ammunition
F) supplies and life support
G) ice and fuel (auxiliary shield)
H) planetary attack weapons
I) matter/antimatter photon drive
J) electromagnetic weaponry
K) missile silos
L) engineering deck
M) planetary attack control
N) planetary attack cowling, mirrored for focusing of photon blast